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## REVIEW.

Wolf von Unwerth, *Untersuchungen über Totenkult und Ódinnverehrung bei Nordgermanen und Lappen*. 1911, pp. 178, (No. 37 of *Germanistische Abhandlungen*.)

The valuable monograph of Wolf von Unwerth attempts to establish for one point, the cult of the departed, what has been assumed more generally and definitely established for certain fields by the investigations of Fritzner. K. Krohn, and A. Olrik, namely that most of the customs of the Lapps are borrowed from their nearest and more advanced neighbors, the Scandinavian. To recall very briefly some of the results of these previous studies: it was established by Fritzner that in certain acts of ritual both names and things are borrowed; by Krohn and Olrik, that the use in them of pastries and brass objects, of sacrificial gifts in the shape of little boats, etc., are not indigenous with the Lapps. Both name and function of the divinity Horagalles point back to the Norse Thor-Karl, and Waralden olmay to Frey (-veraldr gud). And a number of minor divinities and practices are parallel to Old Norse prototypes.

All this information of Lappish loans becomes, secondarily, valuable for throwing light on the original religious customs of the Scandinavians about which, it will be recalled, very little is found in our sources, however well we are informed about their mythology. On the other hand, thanks to the intelligent endeavors of the Norwegian and Swedish missionaries of the 17th and 18th century, there is a considerable body of information on Lappish mythology and rites. Again, much critical sifting is necessary, in the case of the Old Norse monuments required for a comparative study of the question, in order to determine which sources offer reliable information on customs and beliefs obtaining during the heathen times and which items in folklore reflect genuine old material. The author proceeds with commendable caution in this, most difficult, part of his task.

There is a universal belief among the Lapps that the dead enter into certain mountains and there live on, leading a better existence than on earth. These mountains are venerated and enjoy a special cult. The best clothes are to be worn in their neighborhood, no hunting is permitted near them, nor any uncleanness or disrespectful action. At times, mortals have been admitted to the realms of the departed and were given good cheer and advice. In their turn the mountain dwellers occasionally issue and have intercourse with mortals. The mountains inhabited by them are worshipped with sacrifices. Frequently there is set up a stone of peculiar or human aspect which functions as altar. This stone is smeared with butter and the blood and fat of animals. Any neglect of these sacrifices is revenged by the spirits who inflict sickness and death on man and beast.

Notwithstanding the fact that similar traits of ancestor worship occur among many peoples the resemblances to Old Norse cult are too strong to be brushed aside. v. Unwerth very justly classifies Old Norse conceptions about the life of the departed into two main groups. The one is the belief that the departed enter into certain mountains. It is exemplified in the famous passage in the *Eyrbyggjasaga*: Thórofr (a first-settler) called a certain promontory

Thórsness. On this there stands a mountain and Thórolf felt such veneration for it that he gave orders that no one was to look that way without first having washed. No killing was to be done on that mountain. He called it Helga-fjall (Holy Mountain) and believed that he as well as his kinsmen would enter into it after death. One night the shepherd of his son Thórstein saw how the mountain opened up. Inside he saw great fires and heard horns and the noise of a big feast. Listening, he heard the company welcome Thórstein and his boat crew. The son was bidden to take the high seat opposite his departed father. On the next morning it is learned that Thórstein and his crew were drowned. It is to be noted that sacred mountains, such as Holy Fell, are not burial places, however.

According to a parallel conception the departed dwelled in their burial mound, sometimes making unsafe their former habitat. At times a passer-by hears them speak a verse on their present condition or past exploits. And heroes have been known to invade the abode of the hangbúi to rob him of the treasures buried with him. These are standing motives in the Fornaldarsagas and by far less trustworthy as reflecting ancient beliefs.

Still further, as the author demonstrates, the Northern elfin cult (cf. *alfsblót*) which closely resembles the Lappish cult of the dead belongs here. Even the sacrificial stone image of the Lapps is found again in the *hørg* which, according to Thümmel, originally designated a rock or knob, but was used as the more primitive place of worship as against the later more elaborate *hof* or temple. Most likely it consisted of a simple stone altar constructed of slabs and situated on the slope of some mountain (witness the frequently recurring phrases *hamra ok høgr*, *høgr né haugr*, but not *hof* etc.) on which sacrifice was made. Cf. *Hervararsaga* ch. 2: "She smeared the *hørg* with blood."

In Lappish belief, disease and death are due to the power of the departed as it must be their endeavor to draw the living into their sphere. Hence especially near relatives are thought to be desirous of their accustomed company, causing injury and death to the remaining family and their animals, unless appeased by sufficient sacrifice.—The historic Icelandic sagas are full of instances of a similar nature. In many cases an epidemic seems to be explained in this fashion. A well-known instance is the Glámr episode of the *Grettissaga*. Again, we have the related belief widely spread over all the Germanic North, of the "Alfenschuss," "elleskud" etc.—some infirmity brought about in animals and men by the missiles of envious elves. They are appeased by smearing the elfin stones with fat and butter.

Very instructive is von Unwerth's aperçu how, with all the identity of fundamental conception, the national traits are very clearly evident. Instead of meekly appeasing the troublesome dead, as do the timid pacific Lapps, the more aggressive Norsemen defend themselves with the brutality of the living, opening the mound and rendering the spectre harmless by the most energetic means. Only the elves, as being more unapproachable, are feared and venerated.

The particular god of death among the Lapps is Rota, an evil demon who plagues both man and beast. To appease him, horses are sacrificed to him; and, to judge from certain indications, human sacrifice to him was customary in earlier times. The spirit Mübenaimo is closely akin to him in function, but

has through Christian influence assumed some of the characteristics of Satan. In Lappish cult the veneration of the dead and of Rota are closely allied. As to the latter, it is entirely beyond doubt that the sacrifice of horses among a people which has no horses cannot be indigenous. Accordingly, A. Olrik made the successful attempt to identify Rota with the Ódin, of the Scandinavians: he is one of the main divinities of the Lapps and, like Ódin, ruler over the kingdom of the dead. Like the Old Norse god he is imagined as a horseman, he appears to men in a blue cloak, is followed by a wolf, and horses are offered up to him.

v. Unwerth makes it his special task to inquire in how far our information about the cult of Rota may be used to fill out the picture of Ódin as furnished in Scandinavian monuments and to corroborate recent views as to his chthonic attributes as lord of night and death which (contrary to the general impression) seem to be the underlying elements of this godhead.

In order to show forth the conception of the god as it prevailed during the latter centuries of the heathen period—which is the only one which could have influenced Lappish mythology in a similar direction—reliance has to be laid chiefly on Scaldic poetry, whose merits in this respect are, not only its indubitable age, but also its many kennings presupposing definite and universal comprehension of the myth or cult alluded to. E. g. the knowledge of the hanged god is proved by the kennings *galga farmr* “the burden of the gallows,” i. e. Ódin (*Háleygiatal*), *gagl hanga* “the goose of the hanged, i. e. the raven” (*Hákonardrápa*) etc. Besides there are, of course, as many direct statements; as when we read in the *Hákonarmál fara með Ódin* “to fare to Ódin,” *drekka öl at Óðins í ondvegi* “to drink beer in the highseat by the side of Ódin” etc., showing knowledge of the Valhalla myth.

The Eddic poems, besides being of doubtful age, are too much under suspicion of Christian influences and of conscious mythologizing. Neither the historians, still less the Fornaldarsagas are to be trusted implicitly. The most interesting feature of v. Unwerth's book is, then, his rich collection of materials, chiefly from Scaldic poetry, shedding light on Ódin as the god of death. The resulting picture as was indicated is widely different from the current impression. He is not only the god of victory, of battle, of poetry, the lord of a paradise for fallen warriors. Sickness and death also are his work, even the hanged, the drowned and the poisoned enter into his realm. It stands to reason that the strict division of the abode of the dead into Valhalla and Hel's dominion is in no wise to be maintained. As to this belief in the realm of the dead it probably developed from the family belief in certain mountains into which their dead members entered.

Of course, comparing Rota and Ódin, it is readily observed that, the cult of the latter is vastly more variegated. To many sides of Ódin there is no correspondence whatever in the figure of Rota. E. g. the Lappish people, which was never warlike, had no use for a war-god. Nor was there any occasion to borrow the conception of a god of poetry. Still, enough similarities in cult and conception remain to justify the inference that the function of Ódin as chthonic deity was widely spread in the oldest times. Other evidence is found in folklore and the Fornaldarsagas, but overshadowed and intertwined with much later conceptions.

The author proceeds with commendable caution in disentangling old from new in this baffling maze of popular tradition. There is only one major instance in which I find it impossible to agree with him. In section 73 the legend of the disappearance of the Yule feast in Hálfdan Svarte's Hall, told in a number of sources, is referred by the author to Ódin's mischievous interference. However, it was irrefutably shown by Moltke Moe<sup>1</sup> that the main source of this legend is an old, widely spread story (Goldener motive). More especially, the feature of the disappearance of the food from the feast is borrowed from a Welsh story in the Mabinogion (Lludd and Llevellys). and was only at a much later time associated with Ódin. The prose of the Grimnismál on which von Unwerth relies is secondary and in no wise reflects old beliefs.

It is curious that von Unwerth says nothing about the etymology of Norwegian-Lappish *Seite*, *Seita* (idol of wood or stone) which of course has nothing to do with German Zeit (! p. 12)<sup>2</sup> but seems to be derived from O. N. *seidr* "witchcraft, magic"; also that the name of Swedish Lapps for similar idols, *Junkare*, certainly owes its origin to Norwegian where the "amtmand" (governor) was called *junker*.<sup>3</sup>

Of the three excursus on Old Norse literature the second, dealing with the Glám episode of the *Grettissaga*, is particularly convincing. The extravagant notion of Boer that this story is based on an old moon myth is there shown to be untenable, whereas it becomes increasingly probable that it is, much rather, a gotten-up literary ghost-story composed of elements loaned from the *Eyrbyggjasaga*, the *Hávardarsaga*, and from folklore.

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<sup>1</sup> "Finnerne i gamle historiske sagn," in Helland's *Finnmarkens Amt*, p. 599. This article ought to have been mentioned among the authorities. In another part of the same volume there is the most compact and authoritative description of Lappish ethnology, folklore, history, etc. to be found anywhere.

<sup>2</sup> At least, the printing is misleading.

<sup>3</sup> Friis, *Lappisk Mythologi* p. 99. 139.